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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5164
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0122
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9803
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6743
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4807
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3448
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0496
RUEHNW/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3540
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0516
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2618
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7309
RUEHBFI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5046
RUEHGKV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1714
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000098

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2016

TAGS: PTER PGOV MOPS PREL CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ARMY MAKES GAINS IN CAMPAIGN TO TAKE VAKARAI

REF: COLOMBO 38 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM JAMES R. MOORE FOR REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe confirmed to pol FSN on January 16 that the security forces, through air strikes and ground movements, made progress against LTTE defenses both north and south of Vakarai on January 16. However, they have not yet captured the strategic bridge at Panichchankerni. (Note: The LTTE may have made preparations to blow up this bridge should the army try to cross it. End note.) Pro-LTTE Tamilnet reported January 17 that fighting was ongoing in the area. The Army and Security Task Force also claim to have captured additional Tiger camps in Ampara and Batticaloa districts, for a total of twelve in the last couple of weeks.

¶2. (C) DATT's military sources indicated January 16 that the army was "consolidating" its position roughly one kilometer from the bridge, having broken through three lines of LTTE defenses. They added that the army cannot push forward in a more serious ground offensive in Vakarai while the ground in the surrounding marsh land remains wet due to the prolonged rainy season. However, they confirmed media reports of at least 30 Tiger cadres and three soldiers killed in the battles.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The security forces' current push to take Vakarai explains Defense Secretary Gotabaya's reluctance to authorize a visit by an ICRC humanitarian needs assessment team to the area. Following a January 11 review of remaining food supplies in Vakarai, the Government Agent, ICRC, and UNHCR agreed that the need was urgent. We will work with the UN organizations, the ICRC, and other donor countries to urge the government to permit another relief convoy. However, it is hard to see that government security forces could countenance a humanitarian resupply mission during the current hot phase of the ongoing struggle for Vakarai.

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